

South Pass City
Fremont County
Wyoming

HABS No. WYO-27

HABS
WYO.7-SOPAC,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20005

SOUTH PASS CITY

HABS
WYO,
7-SOPAC,
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Location: South Pass City, Fremont County, Wyoming.
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: (USGS South Pass City Quadrangle Map) 12.680840.4703900.

Present Owner: State of Wyoming, State Office Bureau of Land Management.

Present Occupant: Nine permanent residents.

Present Use: Restored example of early 1870 Mining Town.

Statement of Significance: South Pass City was the focal point in the development in the Sweetwater Gold Mine Field, the largest gold rush area in Wyoming. In addition, it was the center of the first successful women's suffrage activity in the United States.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

Ownership of land in South Pass City is complicated by multiple claims to properties. The original plat of the townsite was laid out in 1867, this plat was lost and a second plat was drawn in 1867. Between 1873 and 1875 the county seat of Sweetwater County shifted between South Pass City and Green River. Because of this vacillation several books on the land records in South Pass City were lost. Today land records for this period can be found in Green River at the Sweetwater County Courthouse, at the State Museum in Cheyenne, and at the Western History Research Center at the University of Wyoming Library at Laramie.

In 1884, South Pass City became part of Fremont County. At that time several placer claims encompassing the area including South Pass City were established and owned by the Federal Gold Mining Company. These included the Wolverine, Lucky Boy, Victory and Jeanette Lode Claims. The Company permitted people to build on the land without buying it. Thus, if there were any records at all of these buildings they were contained in the records of the tax assessor.

In 1902, the Federal Gold Mining Company made a third plat of the town. This plat covered the area of the Wolverine Placer Claim which included approximately the western two-thirds of the original plat of South Pass City. The Company arranged with the owners

of the buildings on the Wolverine Claim to give them the land upon which their buildings were located in exchange for one dollar, thus preventing any future court challenge. The Company sold the same plot of land to several owners in some instances. In addition, they changed the names of the streets in South Pass City.

Throughout the 1873-1948 period the Sherlock family proceeded to acquire title to much of the property in South Pass City. Fred Stratton, grandson of H. G. Nickerson, one of the original South Pass City settlers, bought a good part of the townsite from the Sherlock family. In 1950 Stratton began making plans to restore the city to its original character. Five years later the major structures of the town's Main Street became the property of Mr. and Mrs. John Woodring who maintained the town for over a decade until it was purchased by the Wyoming 75th Anniversary Commission in 1967. The Commission donated the site to the State of Wyoming and the 39th State Legislature in turn created the Old South Pass Historical Preserve Commission to administer the site. Presently, through the action of the 1969 State Legislature, South Pass City is administered by the Wyoming Recreation Commission.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Town:

South Pass City was the most important town established during the short-lived period of discovery and development in Wyoming's Sweetwater Gold Mining District. The town derives its name from the famous South Pass on the Oregon Trail which traverses the Rocky Mountains just ten miles to the southwest. Thousands of people traveled through the South Pass during the era of overland migration lured by reports of lucrative mining fields in California, Colorado, Idaho and Montana.

Gold was first discovered in the Sweetwater region about 1842 by a Georgian trapper working for the American Fur Company. Between 1855 and 1860 the presence of gold in the area occasioned limited activity, although nothing developed as a result of these early mining attempts. It was not until 1864 when Tom Ryan, a soldier, discovered the Carissa quartz lode that a "gold rush" began in the area.

The Carissa Mine (WYO-30) was the first to be recorded in the Shoshone Mining District and was one of the richest. By July 1867 there were forty mines recorded in the region. On June 15, 1867 the miners of the Shoshone Mining District held a meeting to draw up the laws and resolutions for the District. By October 1867 the plat of the townsite called South Pass City had been laid out. The Main Street was a half-mile long. Along it were

constructed the Idaho House (WYO-48), the U. S. Hotel, the Eclipse Hotel, the City Hotel, and the Kidder Hotel; Houghton and Colter opened the first store (WYO-38), two clothing stores and several general stores were established. Thirteen saloons and sundry other businesses sprang up to service the town's swelling population. In 1869 the Exchange Bank (WYO-36) was opened by Iliff and Company. The Bank bought the gold of the miners and shipped it to New York. Two doctors and a number of lawyers set up practice. George Keene opened a fur store, and the Freund Brothers opened a gun shop in the downstairs of the Masonic Lodge (WYO-40). By that time, there were two breweries and several livery and feed stables in town. Elisha Steel had a blacksmith shop next to the Black Horse Livery Stable (WYO-29), and Ervin F. Cheney established a blacksmith and wagon shop. A post office and newspaper were also established in South Pass City. The Sweetwater Mines began publication in 1868; it was replaced the following year by The South Pass News which was published three times a week and later twice a week.

Before the end of 1867 the miners held another meeting and organized a county which they named "Carter" in honor of Judge William Carter of Fort Bridger. Carter County was legally organized by an act of the Seventh Dakota Legislative Assembly on December 26, 1867, and South Pass City was named the county seat. Carter County remained a part of Dakota Territory until July 25, 1868, when the Organic Act was passed by the Fortieth Congress of the United States and created the Territory of Wyoming. South Pass City continued as the county seat following the territorial change.

A petition by the citizens of Wind River Valley for the right to open a road to South Pass City was granted by the County Commissioners on December 19, 1868. The road was declared a county road, free from all tolls. This is the first record of a county owned road for Carter County. On April 6, 1869 the county commissioners granted C. Fry and J. W. Minifer permission to form a company for the purpose of constructing a toll road between South Pass City and Atlantic City. They charged fifty cents for two horses and a wagon, five cents per head for loose stock, and twenty-five cents for two horses.

The citizens of South Pass City petitioned the County Commissioners to grant them a charter of incorporation on February 7, 1869. No action was taken at that time and the citizens of the City petitioned the Board again on April 28 to order an election so that the citizens could vote on the question of incorporation of South Pass City. The Board granted this petition and on May 10 the election was held. One hundred twenty-six votes were cast in favor of incorporation and six votes against. The following day, May 11, the election

was found legal and the returns judged to be correct; South Pass City was declared an incorporated town.

The First Legislative Assembly of Wyoming Territory, held December 13, 1869 changed the county name from Carter to Sweetwater. This Assembly is particularly noted for the passage, on December 10, 1869, of an act giving the women of Wyoming Territory the right to vote and hold office. The bill, introduced before the legislature by William Bright of South Pass City, was the first women's suffrage act in the United States. It is said that shortly before the first Wyoming Territorial election was held, Mrs. Esther Hobart Morris invited the two local candidates to her house for tea. At this time Mrs. Morris supposedly asked the two opposing candidates, Captain H. G. Nickerson, Republican, and William H. Bright, Democrat, to promise that whomever was elected would introduce and work for passage of an act giving women the right of suffrage.

Mrs. Morris also holds the title of being the first woman Justice of the Peace. On February 14, 1870 Mrs. Morris's application as Justice of the Peace was presented to the Board of Commissioners for Sweetwater County. All of the commissioners voted in favor of Mrs. Morris. A correction of this vote subsequently appeared in the March 5 record where it was noted that Mr. Single had voted against rather than for Mrs. Morris. As Justice of the Peace, Mrs. Morris filled a vacancy created by the resignation of J. W. Stillman. Mr. Stillman was evidently displeased to be succeeded in office by Mrs. Morris and, when ordered to turn over the court docket to her, he refused. Legal proceedings finally had to be instituted against him in order to obtain the docket.

Mrs. Morris had come to South Pass City in 1869. When she became the Justice of the Peace she "filled the position with great credit to herself and to the satisfaction of the people of South Pass." She held court at her home and was obligated to hear and decide many exciting and difficult cases, but on no occasion were her judgments and decisions overruled. The first case she heard was on April 28, 1870 and the thirty-fourth and last was on October 30, 1870. Although her tenure as Justice of the Peace was short, Esther Morris was a credit to her cause and made noteworthy contribution to the principle of "equal rights for women."

Several mining districts were established in the Sweetwater region during its heyday and other towns which came into being included Atlantic City (WYO-60), Miner's Delight (WYO-59) and Lewiston. The large numbers of miners spread out through the claims caused an escalation in hostile encounters between Indians and the Miners. Between 1867 and 1869 twenty-six whites and an untold number of Indians were said to have died as the result of such encounters. Although the Shoshone and Bannock Indian tribes were friendly to

the white settlers, the Arapahoes were particularly active in making retaliatory raids upon miners as they worked alone or in small groups. During the summer of 1868 a group of seven miners were attacked by a band of Sioux Indians; three miners were killed. Attacks like this precipitated countless appeals to military authorities for protection. Joint meetings of the citizens of South Pass City and Atlantic City (WYO-60) to decide on measures to be taken against Indian depredation resulted in a militia raid on an Arapahoe camp on April 7, 1870. In June Fort Stambaugh was established in Smith's Gulch near Atlantic City to provide further protection to the settlers. For the next eight years the South Pass area was protected by soldiers from this fort.

In Governor Campbell's message to the Third Legislative Assembly on November 4, 1873 he reported that there had been a significant improvement in Indian relations in the Territory. A recent treaty with the Shoshone Indians had resulted in agreement by the Indians to abandon their claim to the Southern portion of their reservation thus leaving the rich mineral region around Miner's Delight (WYO-59) and the fertile valleys on the Popo Agie open to settlement.

The Third Legislative Assembly passed an act on December 9, 1873 which changed the county seat of Sweetwater County from South Pass City to Green River. This act had two sections: the first provided for the removal of all County records from South Pass City to Green River and the second stated that the citizens of the county should vote on which town would be the county seat.

The County Commissioners met at Green River from December 22, 1873, until December 30, 1873; by January 15, 1874, they were once again holding their meetings in South Pass City. On August 6, 1874, the County Commissioners decided that at the next general election, (to be held on September 1) the citizens of Sweetwater County should vote upon the question of the location of the county seat.

On October 23, 1874, the County Commissioners demanded that the County Clerk give them a certificate which would show the results of the election. The certificate was given to the Board, and it showed that South Pass City had received the greater number of votes for the county seat. The Board of Commissioners instructed the County Clerk and Probate officer to remove all the county records in their possession to South Pass City with as little delay as possible. When the new County Commissioners requested the Treasurer to turn in his books on January 15, 1875, he claimed that he could not because some of the books had been stolen during the removal of the County Records from Green River to South Pass City. The Board granted the request of the Treasurer not to make known to the public the loss of the records until February 1. The Treasurer thought that the records might be located by that time.

However, after an investigation it was announced that the following county records had been stolen: Treasurer's Cash Book, Record of County Warrants, Record of Deeds Book No. 5, and Index Book. On February 9, 1875, the Commissioners of Sweetwater County issued a statement that because of the loss of these records, it would be impossible to make a full statement of the county activities for 1874.

The question of the location of the county seat of Sweetwater County was finally taken to court for settlement. On May 5, 1875, the case of the Territory of Wyoming vs. the Board of County Commissioners of Sweetwater County was heard. On May 10, 1875, the decision was given. The court decided that the Board of Commissioners of Sweetwater County must hold its meetings at Green River and remove from South Pass City to Green River all county records, books, monies, and other movable property. Thus, the lengthy dispute was concluded.

Although promoters had estimated the population of South Pass City to be 2,000, the first Federal Census taken in Wyoming Territory in 1870 showed 460 people living in South Pass City. Of these, 436 were white, 16 were black, and 8 were Chinese. In 1871 a fire broke out in town and several buildings, including the newspaper, were seriously damaged or destroyed. The newspaper's owner, Mr. E. A. Slack, moved to Laramie and there was no further news publication in South Pass City.

The mines had been in decline for several years. The 1871 fire and the removal of the county seat in 1874 eclipsed South Pass City's political and economic prominence in the area. The town continued to exist, but with a population of about 50. A few families stayed on as residents and in succeeding years various groups attempted to revive the mining industry, but South Pass City never came close to regaining its old vigor. In all, an estimated seven million dollars worth of precious metal was produced from the mines in the region.

Through the efforts of the Old South Pass Historical Preserve Commission and the Wyoming Recreation Commission South Pass City has been restored. Today it is possible to visit South Pass City and see many early structures in a setting which compliments their historic character.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

- a. Photographic File of South Pass City at the Wyoming Recreation Commission at Cheyenne, Wyoming.

- b. Photographic File of South Pass City at South Pass City, Wyoming.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

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Prepared by J. William Rudd
Architect
Project Supervisor
and John Paige
Project Historian
National Park Service
Summer, 1973

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1973 Wyoming Project undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Wyoming Recreation Commission. During the project, records were made on twenty-eight (28) individual subjects and six (6) historic areas.

This project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was Professor J. William Rudd, Architect, of the University of Cincinnati. Project Historian was John Paige, Oklahoma State University. The measured drawings were prepared by John Uhler, University of California at Berkeley, Architect; and Student Assistant Architects Richard Duflocq, University of Cincinnati, Clayton Fraser, University of Tennessee, and Richard Wyatt, California Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo. Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic record. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.

ADDENDUM TO:

SOUTH PASS CITY
South Pass City
Freemont County
Wyoming

HABS No. WY-27

HABS
WYO
7-SOPAC,
1-

XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20001

ADDENDUM TO:
SOUTH PASS CITY, GENERAL VIEW
South Pass City
Fremont County
Wyoming

HABS WY-27
WYO, 7-SOPAC, 1-

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

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